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COMMENT ON SOVIET REJECTION OF INVITATION TO
AUSTRIAN PEACE TREATY DISCUSSION

Soviet rejection of a bid for four-power discussions of an Austrian peace treaty follows several hints from Russian diplomatic sources that an Austrian settlement would be possible if the U.S.-sponsored abridged treaty were withdrawn. Although both of the recent major PRAVDA editorials on international issues blamed the Austrian impasse on the West, neither raised any new obstacles to settlement.

The PRAVDA editorials, and particularly the one of 24 May, stressed the point that the Soviet Union could not accept any pre-conditions to discussions of major world issues. Such pre-conditions, in the view of the Kremlin, smack of dictation and must be rejected. It was from this angle that PRAVDA attacked the coming Bermuda conference. Austria was one of the issues mentioned by President Eisenhower as a test of Soviet sincerity.

It may be, therefore, that Soviet refusal to discuss Austria reflects the present government's sensitivity to being "forced" into negotiations. The Kremlin may fear that an Austrian settlement now, even on terms relatively favorable to the USSR, would be interpreted in the West as a sign of Soviet weakness. In addition, the Kremlin might consider that any Austrian discussions at this time would disclose its intentions prematurely and prejudice its position in any four-power meeting.

Insofar as they have created confusion in the Western camp, the divisive tactics of the new Soviet regime have yielded results without resort to any major conciliatory move. The Kremlin may consider that it can furnish sufficient impetus to its peace offensive through a continuation of minor conciliatory gestures and through the Korean negotiations, without making major concessions in Europe.

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